

## CLAIMS

1. Method for use in a telecommunications network for providing messages between users, comprising the steps of:

receiving a voice message from a first terminal spoken by a first user for a second  
5 user at a second terminal,  
checking availability of said second terminal, and  
immediately sending the received voice message to the second terminal if  
available.

10 2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of storing the voice message until the step of checking availability determines the second terminal is available.

3. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of notifying the second user at the second terminal of the received voice message from the first user prior to said step of  
15 immediately sending.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein said step of immediately sending the received voice message to the second terminal is carried out only after the second user signals acceptance.

20 5. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:  
receiving a voice message from the second terminal spoken by the second user,  
and  
immediately sending the received voice message to the first terminal.

25 6. The method of claim 5, further comprising the step of checking the availability of said first terminal before carrying out said step of immediately sending the received voice message to the first terminal.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of storing the received voice message in the second terminal for playback by the second user at the convenience of the second user.

5 8. Apparatus for use in a telecommunications network for providing messages between users, comprising:

means for receiving a voice message from a first terminal spoken by a first user for a second user at a second terminal;

means for checking availability of said second terminal; and

10 means for immediately sending the received voice message to the second terminal if available.

9. The apparatus of claim 8, further comprising means for storing the voice message until the means for checking availability determines the second terminal is available.

15 10. The apparatus of claim 8, further comprising means for notifying the second user at the second terminal of the received voice message from the first user prior to the received voice message transmission to the second terminal.

20 11. The apparatus of claim 10, wherein the received voice message is sent to the second terminal only after the second user signals acceptance.

12. The apparatus of claim 8, further comprising:

25 means for receiving a voice message from the second terminal spoken by the second user in reply to the voice message from the first user; and

means for immediately sending the voice message received from the second user to the first terminal.

30 13. The apparatus of claim 12, further comprising means for checking the availability of the first terminal before immediately sending the voice message received from the second terminal to the first terminal.

14. The apparatus of claim 8, further comprising means for storing the voice message received in the second terminal for playback to the second user at the convenience of the second user.

5 15. A voice message system including a plurality of terminals and a voice message service center, said service center comprising:

means for receiving a voice message from a first user terminal;

means for storing the received voice message from the first terminal;

means for checking availability of an intended second user at a second terminal;

10 means for sending the stored received message from the first terminal to the second terminal if the second terminal is available.

16. The system of claim 15, said service center further comprising means for notifying the second terminal of the voice message received from the first terminal  
15 wherein the received voice message from the first terminal is sent to the second terminal upon receiving an acceptance signal from the second terminal in response to the notification.

17. The system of claim 15, wherein one or more of said plurality of terminals  
20 comprises:

means for receiving said voice message at said first user terminal spoken by a first user for providing said voice message from said first user terminal to said means for receiving said voice message at said service center;

25 means for storing voice messages including said voice message spoken by said first user;

means for receiving a designation signal from said first user designating a second user as an intended recipient;

means for retrieving the stored voice message in response to the designation signal for providing the voice message retrieved from storage and the designation signal;

30 and

means for sending the voice message retrieved from storage and the designation signal to the second user of the voice message system as an outgoing voice message.

18. The voice message system of claim 17, wherein said one or more of said plurality of terminals further comprises:

means for receiving an incoming voice message from the second user for storage in the means for storing SVMs; and

means for playback of the incoming voice message to the first user after retrieval from the means for storing voice messages by the means for retrieving stored voice messages.

19. The voice message system of claim 18, wherein said one or more of said plurality of terminals further comprises:

means for receiving notification of the incoming voice message from the second user for display or notification thereof to the first user; and

means responsive to an acceptance indication input signal from the first user for sending the acceptance indication input signal for use in the voice message system in deciding whether to send the incoming voice message from the second user to the first user.

20. The voice message system of claim 17, wherein the means for receiving the voice message spoken by the first user includes voice recognition means for recognizing the voice message spoken by the first user for providing the voice message as a text message for storage in and retrieval from the means for storing voice messages as a text message for transmission as an outgoing text voice message via a short message service center.

21. The voice message system of claim 20, wherein the means for receiving an incoming voice message from the second user may include means for receiving an incoming text voice message for storage in the means for storing voice messages as a text message and wherein the means for playback of the incoming text voice message is for displaying the incoming text message on a display of the user equipment.

22. The user equipment of claim 20, wherein the means for receiving an incoming voice message from the second user is means for receiving an incoming text voice message for storage in the means for storing voice messages as a text message and  
5 wherein the means for retrieving the stored voice message is also for converting the retrieved voice message to a voice signal for playback on a means for playback as an enunciated voice message.

23. User equipment for use in a voice message system, comprising:  
10 means for receiving a short voice message (SVM) spoken by a first user;  
means for storing SVMs including said SVM spoken by said first user;  
means for receiving a designation signal from the first user designating a second user as an intended recipient;  
means for retrieving the stored SVM in response to the designation signal for  
15 providing the SVM retrieved from storage and the designation signal; and  
means for sending the SVM retrieved from storage and the designation signal to the second user of the voice message system as an outgoing SVM.

24. The user equipment of claim 23, further comprising:  
20 means for receiving an incoming SVM from the second user for storage in the means for storing SVMs; and  
means for playback of the incoming SVM to the first user after retrieval from the means for storing SVMs by the means for retrieving stored SVMs.

25. The user equipment of claim 24, further comprising:  
means for receiving notification of the incoming SVM from the second user for display or notification thereof by the user equipment; and  
means responsive to an acceptance indication input signal from the first user for sending the acceptance indication input signal for use in the voice message system in  
30 deciding whether to send the incoming SVM from the second user to the user equipment of the first user.

26. The user equipment of claim 23, wherein the means for receiving the SVM spoken by the first user is voice recognition means for providing the SVM as a text message for storage in and retrieval from said means for storing SVMs as a text message for transmission as an outgoing text SVM via a short message service (SMS) center.

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27. The user equipment of claim 26, wherein the means for receiving an incoming SVM from the second user is means for receiving an incoming text SVM for storage in the means for storing SVMs as a text message and wherein the means for playback of the incoming text SVM is for displaying the incoming text message on a display of the user equipment.

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